health

Crutches for children

Emergency department factsheets

Children

Why use crutches

Crutches can help your child recover from leg injuries, such as a fracture, surgery, sprain or strain. By reducing the amount of weight placed on an affected leg, injuries can heal quicker.

When to use crutches

Crutch walking is difficult. Generally children need to be at least seven years old to safely use crutches. Your child will be assessed to ensure crutches are appropriate and can be safely used.

Some children will not manage crutches safely and a walking frame or wheelchair is a better option.

Measuring crutches

The top of the crutch should be about two finger widths below the armpit. The handles should be positioned so that the elbows are almost straight when your child is standing.

To measure a child lying flat (see figure 1):

- ensure their shoulders are relaxed
- measure from two finger-widths below the armpit to the base of the heel (with child's toes pointing to the ceiling)
- for the handle height, measure from the wrist crease to the base of the heel with the elbow almost straight
- check again when you child stands up that the crutches are the correct height, and adjust if necessary.

The amount of weight your child can put on an affected leg depends on the injury. Be guided by your health care professional.

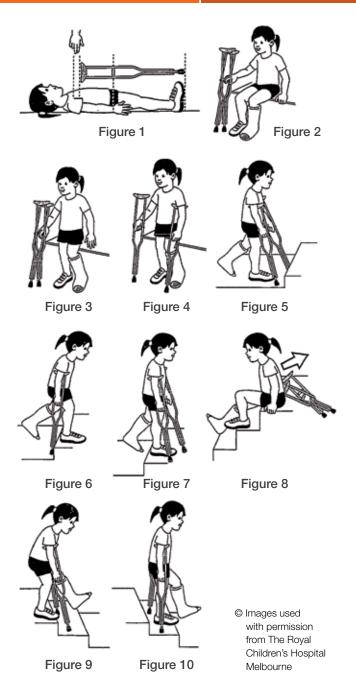
Crutch walking

- Move crutches forward not too wide, not too narrow.
- Lean forward to bring weight over crutches then, pushing through arms, hop through with unaffected foot.

Standing

- Hold both crutches firmly in one hand, with the other hand on seat or armrest (figure 2).
- Keep non-affected foot flat on floor.
- Slide bottom forward to edge of seat.
- Lean forward, then stand (figure 3).
- Place crutches under each arm (figure 4).
- Push through wrists, which keeping crutch pads firmly against chest wall.
- Do not lean through armpits.





Walking up stairs

- Place crutches close to the step (figure 5).
- Pushing through arms, lean forward to bring weight over crutches, then hop on to first step with unaffected foot (figure 6).
- Straighten body while bringing crutches up on to first step (figure 7).
- Continue carefully up stairs.
- If unsafe, child may sit on step and go up on their bottom (figure 8).

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Walking down stairs

- Place crutches carefully down to step below.
- Move affected foot out in front of crutches and lean slightly forward to bring weight through crutches (figure 9).
- Pushing firmly through arms, step down on to unaffected foot (figure 10).
- Continue slowly down stairs, repeating the sequence.
- If unsafe, child may sit on step and go down on their bottom.

Safety tips

- Make sure your child puts any weight through their hands, not their armpits.
- Make sure your child wears supportive, non-slip shoes, such as runners.
- Do not walk let your child use crutches while wearing socks as they are too slippery.
- Encourage your child to take their time, especially when using stairs.
- Crutches should be kept close to your child's feet and not moved too far out to the side.
- Your child should not pivot on their good foot, but rather hop around to change direction.

How long does my child need crutches for?

This depends on your injury and how quickly your child recovers. It is important to follow medical advice and to attend all follow-up appointments.

Notes:

Seeking help



In a medical emergency go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance (dial 000).



For other medical problems see your local doctor or health care professional.

For health advice from a Registered Nurse you can call **NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day** on **1300 60 60 24** for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.*

NURSE-ON-CALL provides access to interpreting services for callers not confident with English. Call **1300 60 60 24**. *Calls from mobile calls may be charged at a higher rate

1 Want to know more?

- See your local doctor or health care professional.
- Visit the Royal Children's Hospital website www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo
- Visit the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

If you would like to receive this publication in an **accessible format**, please phone 9096 0578 or email edfactsheets@health.vic.gov.au



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